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ABSTRACT

Since many acts of aggression in society are more than simply an aggressor-victim encounter, the role played by third person instigated aggression also needs examination. The purpose of this study was to develop a laboratory procedure to systematically investigate instigation. In a competitive reaction time task, high and low Machiavellian Males suggested which shock intensity their partners should deliver to an opponent. Instrumental reward, partner's cooperativeness, and opponent's provocation increased the aggressiveness of the suggestions across the blocks of trials, while Machiavellianism had no effect. References are included. (Author/SES)

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Third person instigated aggression

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An extensive amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between an aggressor and his victim. However, when we examine many acts of aggression in society we sometimes find more than simply an aggressor-victim encounter. For example, in war we observe that some men send other men off to do the actual fighting. In organized crime the concept of the "contract" is infamous; a boss sanctions the murder of a rival. Charles Manson was convicted of several murders on the basis that he instigated them, although the evidence demonstrated that he did not actually commit the crimes. In the Angela Davis trial, attempts are being made to establish that she was the instigator of the courtroom kidnap-slaying of a California judge, in connection with the Soledad incident.

In these cases of aggression, we observe more than an aggressor-victim relationship; the role played by the instigator is evident. Thus, to more fully understand aggression in our society, examination of just aggressor-victim encounters is insufficient. We must also consider those instances of third person instigated aggression. In the present study, this phenomenon was defined as a situation in which a third person initiates or instigates an aggressive encounter between two other persons but is himself not actually involved in the commission of the aggressive act, which is defined as the delivery of noxious stimuli to another.

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Since there has been a paucity of controlled laboratory research concerning the antecedents of instigated aggression, the purpose of the present study was to develop a laboratory procedure in which instigation could be systematically studied. Specifically, the effects of instrumental gain, the potential aggressor's cooperativeness, and the victim's aggressiveness on the instigative behavior of subjects high or low in Machiavellianism were assessed.

Method

A subject and confederate were brought into a room and told that they would be competing in a reaction time (RT) task with two other persons in the adjoining room. They were informed that one of them would be an Advisor and the other a Responder. They then drew slips of paper to randomly determine roles. Actually, both slips of paper said "Advisor," so that the real subject was always the advisor. On each trial the subject, as advisor, was to suggest to the responder which of 5 intensities of shock he thought the opposing responder ought to receive. The responder's task was to actually participate in the competition. Subjects were told that the responder would be distracted from his goal of having the fastest reaction times possible if he had to also concentrate on setting shocks. Thus, by the subjects making the suggestions, the responder was relieved of the burden of decision-making. The opponent was to receive the shock set if he were slower than subject's responder in removing his finger from the RT key. At the end of each trial the subject and his responder received feedback concerning the intensity of shock their opponent had set for them, and if the responder were slower he ostensibly received the shock as well.

There were 5 events in each trial: (1) the subject suggested a shock intensity; (2) the responder then set a shock intensity; (3) the responder depressed the RT key; (4) the responder released the key; and (5) feedback informing the subject and his responder of the shock intensity the opponent chose for the responder to receive. If the responder lost, he feigned receipt of the shock. Actually, the experimenter determined who would win on each trial, and what shock intensities would be set by the opponent. There were really no opponents and the responder never received shock.

The experimental conditions were defined by 3 between-subject variables,

three trials and No. 2 on 3 trials. The remaining 3 blocks had average shock settings of 2.5, 3.5, and 4.5, respectively.

The responders were instructed not to communicate with the advisor. If the advisor did ask the responder what he thought, the responder was to give brief, noncommital answers. The experimenter tape recorded the entire session.

At the end of a session, the subject was asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to assess his view of his responder and to probe the motives behind his instigative strategies.

Results

Aggressive suggestions

The aggressiveness of a subject's suggestions was defined as the shock intensity that he instructed the responder to set on each trial. Separate analyses were performed on subjects' trial one responses, their suggestions during the first four trials, when the level of the opponent's attack was minimal, and their responses during the blocks of increasing attack from the opponent. The analysis of trial one responses revealed no significant effects of Money, Cooperation (Coop), or Machiavellianism. The analysis of variance of the shock intensities suggested during the first four trials of minimal attack revealed only that the main effect of Money approached significance at the .05 level ($F = 3.67$, $df = 1/72$, $p < .056$). The mean shock intensity suggested by subjects in the Money conditions was 2.42, while the mean shock intensity suggested by those in the No Money conditions was 1.98.

The mean shock intensity of subjects' suggestions following trials on which they won and the mean shock intensity following trials on which they lost were computed for each block of increasing provocation. An analysis of

variance of these shock intensities as a function of Mach, Coop, and Money was then performed. The resultant analysis yielded several significant results. Of particular interest is the fact that the "pacifistic" strategy of the noncooperative responder effectively reduced the intensity of aggressive instigation. Subjects in the Coop groups suggested more intense shocks to the responder (2.90) than did subjects in the Noncoop groups (2.14). This effect was significant at the .004 level ($F= 15.62$, $df= 1/72$). The money variable was also effective in determining the aggressiveness of the instigative responses ($F= 3.88$, $df= 1/72$, $p<.05$). The No Money groups suggested an average intensity of 2.33, while the Money groups had a mean of 2.71. Thus, when the amount of money a subject could receive depended upon the intensity of the shock set, he tended to suggest the higher shocks.

The average aggressiveness of an instigation increased across blocks of trials ($F= 31.18$, $df= 3/216$, $p<.001$) and Newman Kuels tests showed that all blocks were significantly different from each other.

The increase in aggressive instigation across blocks of trials appears to have been at least partially dependent upon the Coop variable, with the Coop groups showing a greater increase than the Noncoop groups. The analysis of variance showed a significant Coop x Block interaction ($F= 3.41$, $df= 3/216$, $p<.02$). Subsequent Newman Kuels tests demonstrated that the significant interaction was indeed due to significant differences among all blocks for the Coop groups, while for the Noncoop groups only blocks three and four differed from block one. Thus, there was a steady increase in aggressive instigations across trial blocks for subjects in the Coop groups from 2.45 in the first block to 3.40 in the fourth block, but the pacifism of the noncooperative responder tended to attenuate this increase for subjects in the Noncoop groups (1.89 to 2.37).

Finally, the analysis revealed a significant effect of Win-Lose ($F = 9.26$, $df = 1/72$, $p < .0004$). The subjects instigated more aggression following a Lose trial (2.60) than following a Win trial (2.44). Although the subjects did not themselves receive any shock during the trials, they responded in a more aggressive manner after losing than after winning.

Surprisingly, the Machiavellianism of a subject was not important in determining the magnitude of his instigative behavior. Neither the main effect of Mach nor the interaction of Mach with Blocks, Coop or Money approached significance at the .05 level.

Discussion

Observations of the subjects' behavior suggest that the experimental situation was successful in permitting the instigation of aggression. Subjects seemed to find the situation believable and became quite involved in the task. Furthermore, the observed behaviors appeared susceptible to the influence of several situational factors.

The results demonstrated that the subjects' instigations became increasingly aggressive as a function of the opponent's attack. It was also shown that when the opponent did not attack, he received more intense shocks at the behest of the instigators who received money than at the direction of those who did not. Apparently, even if a potential victim has not provoked aggression, he will be the target of aggression if instrumental gain is involved. However, if the victim then counterattacks, the intensity of the attacks directed toward the victim will increase further.

The response of the subject to the opponent's attack may be explained in terms of a norm of reciprocity. This would be consistent with other aggression research. Attack increases the liklihood of counterattack.

Why subjects were more instigative following the lose trials than the win trials is not clear. In studies of direct aggression, employing the competitive RT task, Taylor (1967) has explained that more intense shocks are given following lose trials than win trials because of an additive relationship between the pain of the shock and the opponent's aggressive intent. The subjects in the present study did not receive shock; thus, such an explanation of the present findings appears to be inadequate. Probably subjects identified with the responder and vicariously experienced the shocks he received. Presumably a subject in the present study saw himself and the responder as a team and may have perceived the physical attack as an attack upon himself.

This explanation of identity with the group seems plausible, especially in terms of real life events. Clearly, government leaders are frequently not the actual objects of attack. More often the citizenry of a locale are the direct victims; however, the authorities express identity with the victims and respond in order to avenge the unjust attack. Lang and Lang (1968) noted, in a discussion of racial disturbances, that "sentiment quickly rallies behind the victim of an apparent outrage [p. 123]."

One of the most interesting findings of the present study was the increased aggressiveness of subjects' suggestions as a function of the cooperativeness of the responder. As early as the 6th trial, subjects with the cooperative responder suggested significantly more intense shock than the subjects with the noncooperative responder. At this point in the experiment, the opponent was still nonprovocative. Even under conditions of high attack, the passive resistance of the noncooperative responder attenuated the aggressiveness of the instigations more than would have been predicted from a simple additive relationship between the Attack and Coop variables. The finding that noncooperation did reduce the aggressiveness of instigations is

of particular interest because of its implications for the use of passive resistance, not on the part of the victim but by the potential aggressor, as a means of aggression control.

One must note that the results discussed above were based on the behavior of the High and Low Machs only, a variable which, surprisingly, did not influence the aggressiveness of the instigations observed in the present study.

A brief discussion of the lack of significant results related to Machiavellianism is in order. Geis and Christie (1970) stated that three general conditions must be met in order for differences between High and Low Machs to be manifested: Irrelevant affect should be aroused; the situation should involve a face-to-face interaction; and there should be latitude for improvisation. In the present study, the first two criteria seem to have been met; however, the situation may have been too structured for differences due to Machiavellianism to be manifested.

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